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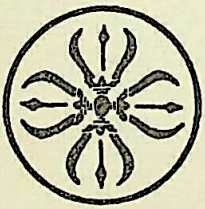

Twelve Annas

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The publisher has come across manuscripts of two little stories which form the subject-matter of the present booklet, among the papers of the Sister Nivedita. The reader will find from them that the author intended to write a series of such stories to make the general reader of the West familiar with the central ideals of Hindu Mythology. From attempts to trace reasons for the gradual evolution of those ideals, the artistic presentation of them, and above all from the deep current of sympathy underlying their treatment—he will be convinced moreover, that the many-sided genius of the author made her past-master in the art of story-telling as well.

The publisher has tried to fulfil his duty to the Indian reader by his attempts to preserve these fragments of high art in the field of literature and regrets he could offer them only in such incomplete condition.

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Siva or Mahadev

Every well-born Hindu boy is taught that his ancestors have not always lived in India. The people's own name for themselves is Aryans and they believe that they came into the Peninsula from the North, across the mountain-passes of the Himalayas. Indeed, there are still a few tribes living in the Hindukush called the *Lall Kaffir,* or Fair Folk, because they are of pale complexion. The original stock of the Hindus probably have been left behind on the Southward march of their countrymen.

At any rate, the stories and present religion of the people have grown up since they crossed the mountains. In early days they had no images. Neither had they temples. They had open spaces or clearings and here they would gather in crowds to perform the Fire-Sacrifice. The fire was made of wood, borne to the spot on the back of a bull. And there were priests who recited chants and knew exactly how to pile up

the logs—for this was done in geometrical patterns, very carefully arranged—and how to make the offerings. This was the business of the priest, just as it is another man's work to grow corn or to understand weaving. He was paid for it and used his money to support his wife and children.

As far as we can go back however, Hindus have always believed that if a man wanted to be *religious*, he must give his whole life up to that. A *good* man may manage a home and family and business, they say. But if a man wants to be musical he gives all his care and thought to music; if clever, to study. And is it easier to know Truth than to do these things? So you see they have a very high ideal of what being religious means. But where do you think they expect a man to go in order to become this? The musician takes his place before some instrument—does he not?—the piano, or the organ, or the violin. And the student goes to school or college. But to become religious, the Hindu would send a man into

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the forest! There he would be expected to live in a cave or under trees; to eat only the wild roots and fruits that he could find in the wood and to wear pieces of the bark of the white birch for clothing. This is a curious picture that you see now with your eyes shut, is it not? But it is not finished. You see the idea is that a great part of religion consists in quieting the mind. And being alone, without any need to think of food or clothes, or home, in silence, amongst the trees and the birds, must be a great help to this. But it goes further. What would become of a man's *hair,* living far away from other men, without brushes and combs and scissors? It would grow thick and unkempt, would it not? And so great masses of hair coiled up hastily and fixed on the top of the head are amongst the best marks of religion in these forest-dwellers. They are expected to bathe constantly, even to wash the hair, but they cannot spare time from meditation to make it beautiful. Now and then we see a man like this passing along the streets of some Indian

city, with his long staff in one hand crowned by three points,—like the trident of Neptune, —and a begging-bowl with a handle in the other. But the place to find such people in great number is some forest, or beside a sacred river. There, we might still see them clothed in strips of birch-bark; but in towns, though they are only passing through, they are almost sure to wear instead a piece of cotton cloth, salmonpink in colour, which has also been a sign of the religious life for thousands of years past.

There was another use of the birch-bark which gives it a peculiar interest. These old hermits, when thoughts occurred to them that *must* be written down, used it for paper! So the oldest Hindu books were made of it (instead of vellum as with us, or papyrus with the Egyptians) and to this day no prayer or text in India is counted so sacred as that which is written on this skin of the birch-tree.

Now I hope you have some notion of what the religious men of early Aryan times (the Vedic period, we call it) looked like.

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SIVA OR MAHADEV

For I want you to imagine the great Fire-Sacrifice, with its crowds of people shouting and worshipping around it—while the priest throws the appointed offerings of oil and grain and foods into it, saying the proper texts—and one or two of these forest-saints mingling with the people to join in the devotions.

I think you can also picture the end of the ceremonies—the fire out, and only a great mound of white wood-ashes remaining, the people gone home; the place deserted, save perhaps for an old hermit who comes up to the mound, takes up a handful of ashes and rubs himself all over with them. To him, it is as if he had clothed himself with the worship of God and with separation from the world—and he goes back to his life under the trees feeling holier and happier.

And so there comes to be a kind of monks who wear this covering of ashes and a pink cloth or strip of birch-bark only.

If you saw one of these in the distance the first thing you would notice would be

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his whiteness. Take wood-ashes from the hearth sometime, when you have a chance, and rub them over one hand and arm. Then you will see that it is not true that there are black men and white men in the world. There are yellow and pink and brown, of different degrees, but a *white* human skin you had never seen till you tried these ashes. Do you see what the next idea of the people was? That perfect holiness and this whiteness would always go together.

Now where were they wandering at this time? Through the Himalayas. And what would often be in sight? The snow-peaks. And of what would the snow-peaks remind them, I wonder!

Have you noticed how a baby thinks that everything is human? How he talks about tables and chairs being "good" or "naughty," about trees laughing and clapping their hands, about stones watching him, shells talking and toy birds and animals walking about? This tendency to see a human being in everything is called the

instinct of *Personification* and people and nations who love beautiful things have it very strongly. The ancient Greeks never made a picture of the sea; where that ought to be they put an old king with a three-pronged staff, called Neptune, and that meant the sea to them. For Neptune was the God of Ocean. In the same way for the city of Athens they had Athene; for the time of harvest, the goddess Demeter, and so on. And each of these figures had special symbols always with it, as the trident of Neptune, the shield and helmet of Athene, the torch of Demeter. And the people had long stories to tell about the reason for drawing and carving them just so.

Now the very self-same thing happened in India (and to a less extent in old Norway and amongst the red men of America). The people could not help making mountains and rivers and stars into spirits, with these things for bodies, and calling them gods.

So the Ganges became a great mother, and the Sun, the kind and loving god Vishnu, while even hills and plants had each an in-

dwelling soul, with a character and will of his own.

In their early home, in the North, they had had a set of gods,—Indra for the sky, Agni for fire, Varuna for water, and others, —but here in the new land, these began to be forgotten, became old-fashioned so to speak. And the inspiration of the place filled the dreams of the people more and more. The Aryans fell in love with India and became Hindus.

And what was their thought about the snow-mountains ?

Why, it seemed to them that *they* told about the fire-worship and the fire about them ! Were not the flames of the sacrifice white like the Himalayas, always mounting upwards like the aspiring peaks, leaving behind them ashes for eternal frost ?

Those snowy heights became the central objects of their love. Look at them. Lifted above the world in silence, terrible in their cold and their distance, yet beautiful beyond all words, what are they like ? Why, they

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are like—a great monk, clothed in ashes, lost in meditation, silent and alone! They are like,—like,—the Great God Himself, Siva, Mahadev!

Having got at this thought, the Hindu mind began to work out all sorts of accessories and symbols,—in which sometimes the idea of flame, sometimes of mountain, sometimes of hermit, is uppermost—all contributing to the completed picture of Siva, the Great God.

The wood is borne to the sacrifice on a bull: Siva possesses an old bull on which He rides.

As the moon shines above the mountains, so He bears on His forehead the new moon.

Like the true ascetic, begging food at the householder's door, He is pleased with very simple gifts.

Fresh water, a few grains of rice and two or three green bel-leaves are His whole offering, in the daily worship. But the rice and water must be of the purest, as though presented to a most honoured guest.

Why the bel-leaf is chosen, I do not know, unless it is that it is clover-shaped, thus referring to the Trinity, like the shamrock. For this doctrine is Hindu as well as Christian and Egyptian.

To show how easily Siva can be pleased, Hindus tell a pretty story.

A poor huntsman,—that is, one of the lowest of the low,—once came to the end of a day's hunting without having snared or killed a single creature. Night came on and he was far from home, in the jungle, alone. Near by, stood a bel-tree, with branches near the ground and he was glad to climb up into its shelter to pass the night in safety from wild beasts. But as he lay crouching in its branches, the thought of his wife and children starving at home came to him, and for pity of their need great tears rolled down his cheeks, and falling on the bel-leaves broke them by their weight and carried them to the ground. Under the sacred tree, however, stood an image of Siva (really, the short stone pillar with rounded top, which is called His

lingam or symbol). And the tears fell, with the leaves, on its head.

That night a black snake crept up the tree and stung the man. And the angels came and carried his soul to Heaven and laid it down at the feet of Siva.

Then in that bright place rose the clamour of many voices questioning—"Why is this savage here ? Has he not eaten impure foods ? Has he offered the right sacrifices ? Has he known the law ?"

But the Great God turned on them all in gentle surprise—"Did he not worship me with bel-leaves and with tears ?" He said.

Looking closer at the *flame,* however, one thing was very clear. It had a blue throat,—we see it even when we light a match—and in order to bestow a blue throat upon Siva, the following story arose.

Once upon a time all the splendour and glory of the gods seemed to be vanishing from them. [This story must have been told first, you see, just at the period when the old gods, Indra, Agni and the Lords of the

universe, were growing unfavourable, and the Trinity, Brahma-Vishnu-Siva, coming into favour.] What to do, the gods did not know. But they, determined to pray to Vishnu for advice. He told them, perhaps contemptuously, to "go and churn the ocean !" And the poor gods trooped forth eagerly to do His bidding.

They churned and churned. Many great and splendid things came up and they seized them with delight, here a wonderful elephant, there a princely horse, again a beautiful wife for someone.

Each was only greedy to be first in the handling of the next delight. All at once something black began to come. Welling up and up, and then spreading over the whole ocean it came. "What is it ?" they asked each other in horror. It was poison,—death to them, death to the world, death to the universe. It came to their very feet and they had to retreat rapidly in fear. Already, they were in the midst of darkness and there was nowhere that they could flee, for this dense

blackness was about to cover all the worlds. In this moment of mortal terror all the gods with one voice called on Siva. He had taken no part in the receiving of gifts, may be, He would be able to help them now. Instantly the Great White God was in their midst. He smiled gently at their dilemma and their fear. And stooping down, He put His hand into the waves and bade the poison flow into the hollow of His palm. Then He drank it, willing to die in order to save the world. But that which would have been enough to destroy all created beings was only enough to stain His throat. Hence He bears there a patch of blue for ever.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful myths that have clustered round the name of Mahadev, however, is the legend of the Boar-Hunt.

Arjuna, one of the principal heroes of the Great War, had gone up into the mountains to spend three months in worshipping Siva and invoking His blessing. Suddenly, one day, as he was praying before

His lingam and offering flowers, the sound of horns rang out with all the merry clang of a royal hunt.

The next moment the Snow-King and Queen rode into view at the head of their retinue and came sweeping down the ravine in pursuit of a poor panting boar, that ran up to Arjuna for protection. The hero roused from his worship, showed the boar a way of escape and stood to meet the challenge of the King, now close upon them. The next moment the whole hunt had come to a stop before him. "The quarry was mine!" cried the King,—and his voice sounded like the winter-blasts amongst the mountains.—"The quarry was mine! How dared you touch it?"

At this address, Arjuna blazed with anger and picking up the bow and arrows he had thrown aside before commencing to worship, he challenged the Snow-King to dismount and fight.

"Accepted!" said the Monarch, and the combat began. But to the hero's dismay, he

seemed to be attacking some terrible phantom, for one after another his good stout arrows disappeared into the person of the King, working him no harm.

"Let's wrestle then!" shouted Arjuna. And casting aside his bow, be flung himself upon his foe. He was met by the quiet touch of a hand on his heart and fell to the ground stunned. "Well, come on!" said the King, as he recovered himself a minute later and turned aside from the contest. But he seemed almost intoxicated. "I must finish my worship first," he said in a thick voice, taking up a garland of flowers to fling round the Siva-Lingam. The next moment the eyes of Arjuna were opened, for the Snow-King towered above him, blessing him. And the flowers were round His neck!

"Mahadev! Mahadev!" cried the worshipper flinging himself on the ground to touch with his head the feet of the God. But already the hunt had swept on down the valley and the Snow-King had disappeared, with all His train.

These are a few of the stories told about Siva, who is so deeply loved by His devotees. To them, there is nothing in the world so strong and pure and all merciful as their Great God, and the books and poems of Hindus are very few in which He is not referred to with this passionate worship.

Wherever you go in Northern India, by the road side in cities and villages, on the river-banks, or inside the entrance to some garden, if there is a tree that stands alone, near the home of any Hindu, you are likely to see beneath it one or more of the little stone pillars called the Lingam. They may have been taken from the bed of a stream and in that case are likely to be of a long egg-shape. But if they have been cut by the hand of man, they are short and slightly tapering, with a thimble-like top. Sometimes, in all good faith, the features of a human face have been more or less crudely marked on them, with white paint!

In any case it is only a question of time till some woman, passing by on her way home

after bathing, stoops tenderly to pour a little water over the head of the emblem and sprinkles a few grains of rice over this. Then she bends her head to the earth before it, saying a prayer, and passes on. Such a simple act of adoration! A man with no objection to a public place, might stop and offer bel-leaves, but the woman wants to reach home and be once more in hiding.

Now and then, a heart more devoted and loving than usual will prompt the touching of the head of the image with red or white sandal-paste, so cool and refreshing in this hot climate!

But this, after all, is but a fragment of stone. It is not He who is worshipped. Still finer images of Him are those who come and go yonder amidst the passing crowd,—the monks and beggars, some ashen-covered with matted hair, others with shaven head and clad from throat to foot in the sacred colour, but most of them bearing one form or other of staff or trident and the begging bowl. And finest of all will these be, when, retiring into

the forest, or climbing up to the verge of eternal snows, they sit, even like this stone Lingam, bolt upright in the shelter of tree or rock, lost to the world without, in solitary meditation.

Do you still want to know where to picture Him, how He is surrounded, what are the pleasures and what the history of His Olympus? The wise and learned of His people will laugh at you—"Understand children," they will say, "that this is the Great God of whom we speak! He can have neither dwelling-place, nor history, nor companions. Such things are vain dreams of men!"

But if you should still persist that you desire greatly to know what men have dreamt of Him in these directions, they will tell you something of the Indian picture of His home.

Far away amongst the mountains, they say, across the frontier, where the Himalayas are at their highest and Indian passes into Thibet, at the foot of the great ice-peak of Kailash, lies the lake Manasasarovara. Here

is the reign of silence and eternal snow. And here is the holy home that Siva loves. Up here have gathered round Him all those who were weary of earth, having found no acceptance amongst the fortunate. The serpents whom all the world hates and refuses, come to Kailash, and Mahadev finds room for them in His Great Heart. And the tired beasts come,—for He is the Refuge of animals,—and one of them, a shabby old bull, He specially loves and rides upon. And last of all, come the spirits of all those men and women who are turbulent and troublesome and queer—the bad boys and girls of the grown-up world, you know! All the people who are so ugly that no one wants to see them; those who do things clumsily, and talk loudly and upset every thing, though they mean no harm; and the poor things who are ridden by one idea, so that they never can see straight, but always seem a little mad, such are the souls on whom He alone has mercy. He is surrounded by them and they love and worship Him. He uses them to do His

errands and they are known as Siva's Demons.

But dearest of all these, dwells with Him in Kailash, His beloved wife Parvati, otherwise known as Sati or Uma and by many other names. And about Her I shall tell you in the next story.

Buddha and Yasodhara

Buddha and Yasodhara

Far away in Northern India stood the old capital of Kapilavastu. And there, on a day more than twenty-five centuries ago, the city and palace were filled with rejoicings, for the fact that the young prince Gautama was born. The king had given the usual handsome presents to the servants who brought the news, and to everyone who had done anything, however trifling, and now he was seated in an inner room, waiting anxiously while a group of wise men worked over papers, and books, and strange instruments, together.

What were they doing, do you ask? A very funny thing. They were reckoning the position of the stars at the little one's birth, and reading the story of his future life from them! Strange as this sounds, it is a very old custom in India, and is faithfully carried out to this day. This star-prophecy is called

a man's horoscope. And I know Hindus who possess the names and horoscopes of their forefathers for thirteen hundred years back!

It took these wise men of Kapilavastu a long time to work out the horoscope of the young prince, for the promise that they read there was so extraordinary that they had to be very sure that they were all agreed, beyond the possibility of a mistake, before they announced it. At last they came and stood before the king.

"Well," said he anxiously, "will the child live?" "He will live, Maharajah!" replied the oldest of the astrologers.

"Ah!" said the king, "It is well." Knowing that, he could wait patiently for the rest. "He will live," repeated the wise man, taking up his tale, "but if this horoscope is cast aright, on the seventh day from now, his mother, Queen Maya, will die. And that shall be the sign to you, O King, that your son is either to be the greatest monarch on earth, or, stung by the woes of

men is to abandon the world and become a great religious teacher." Then he handed over the papers to the father and withdrew with his companions.

"The Queen will die—a Great King—or a religious teacher," these words echoed and re-echoed in the ears of the sovereign, as he sat alone and thought over the prophecy. The terrible event that was to be the sign scarcely seemed more awful to him than the picture that the last words conjured up—"A religious teacher"—a beggar—the words were one and the same. The king shuddered. But stay! The words had been "*Stung by the woes of men* he will abandon the world"—"My son shall never know the woes of men," said the father with determination, feeling that he could thus force him to the destiny that he preferred, that of a mighty conqueror.

On the seventh day the soul of Queen Maya passed away, even as the wise men had said. Every tenderness and care had been lavished on her during that last week,

but to no purpose. On the day foretold, she went to sleep like a happy child and woke no more.

Then, amidst King Suddhodhana's grief, there was an added feeling of anxiety, for he was sure now that the astrologers had told the truth, and he was determined to save his son from the fate of a beggar, when he might instead of that become the richest and most powerful sovereign in the world.

Those about the boy, as he grew up, could well believe that some wonderful future was in store for him. He was so bright and full of fun, so clever at books and games, and above all he would give so much love in a word or a glance that all who were near him grew devoted to him and he had no rivals. He was "full of pity," as they always said of him. He would nurse a broken-winged bird back to life with endless care; he could never bring himself to shoot dumb creatures for sport with his bow and arrows like his friends, the young nobles of Kapilavastu. He did not think it manly,

he said, to rejoice in the pain and sorrow of the little brothers. So he knew the trouble that comes upon one who is wounded by an arrow; but of no other kind of misery had he ever heard. His home was a palace. Round it lay a garden and this again open into a great park, stretching many miles to the north of the capital in all directions. Outside these bounds he never passed as a boy. Here he could ride and practise archery, and wander for hours together, observing, thinking and dreaming. And here there was no sorrow, or none that spoke loudly to one who had never yet himself known suffering. The spot was a whole kingdom in itself. He never thought of travelling beyond its bounds. And his father forbade any to speak in his hearing of pain or death. So he did not even know that such things could be. For Suddhodhana remembered always the words "*Stung by the woes of men,*" and from a knowledge of those woes he sought to guard his son.

The years of study for Indian youths

ought to last till thirty. Then a man stands free. Now when the young Gautama drew near this age he might have chosen to leave his home for other countries. None could forbid—for he was now a man—not even the king. So at this point they sought to catch him, as it were, in a network of roses. They suggested to him that it was time to marry and settle down. They felt sure that it was now only a question of time. If he had a wife and children that he loved, about him, he would become involved in such a pressure of pleasure and of business that he would be unable to leave home, and for his children's sake he would wish to be richer and richer till he should become the richest and most powerful sovereign in the world, even as the wise men had said at his birth.

But Gautama was positive on one point. He must see his bride, and choose her for himself. So all the young nobles who had sisters were invited with them to spend a week at court; and morning after morning there would be games of skill, whirling of

clubs or fencing or riding. And in the evenings plays or displays of juggling or serpent-charming were given in the palace-theatre, and all enjoyed the entertainments together.

There was one lady whom the king and his ministers and even these guests hoped that the Prince would choose. For her beauty and talents and birth were even more distinguished than those of others. And her name was Yasodhara.

But when the last day came and Gautama stood beyond the doors saying farewell to his guests and offering to each some splendid memento of her visit,—to one a necklace, to another a bracelet, to a third some beautiful gem,—he had nothing at all for Yasodhara, save a single flower which he took from his own cloak. And the onlookers understood from this neglect that he had made some other choice. And all, save the maiden herself, were very sorry. To her, that one blossom seemed more precious than all the jewels of her friends. And when

next day, the King of Kapilavastu waited in person on her father to ask her in marriage for his son, it was scarcely a surprise to her. It seemed only strange that it should be so simple and natural. Perhaps she was already half-conscious of the long chain of lives behind them in which she had always been his wife.

But Yasodhara was one whose name drew many suitors. And honour demanded that Gautama should win her by proving himself, in open lists, the knightliest of all those who aspired to win her hand. Such was the custom of the royal caste. And with this stipulation, the prince's proposal was welcomed by the father.

Gautama was delighted with the reply, and challenged all rivals to enter the lists with him on the appointed day. "Alas!" said his relatives, "how will you, who have always refused to aim at the flying bird or escaping deer, succeed in hitting the revolving boar at a tourney? Or how can you stand a chance against great archers in

drawing the gigantic bow ?" But he gave no answer save laughter. Fear was unknown to him, and he found great springs of power within himself. When the hour arrived, his confidence was justified, for he distanced all competitors, carrying away every prize.

So came about the marriage of Gautama, the prince, with Yasodhara.

Their future home was made still lovelier than the old. A new palace, spanning a water-course, with great arches was built of rose-red stone and dark carved wood. At one end of the garden the leaping stream surrounded an island of white marble, on which was a suite of cool, white, summer-chambers, while numbers of fountains were concealed in the bed of the river to make waterspouts, when desired, all round the summer-house. And the window spaces were filled with fretted woods or perforated marbles, that there might always be air, shadow and privacy, and at the same time perfect ease to view the spreading lawns covered with fruit and blossom trees and

flower-filled borders. In a corner of each royal hall, hung from the beams of the ceiling by great chains, was something like a cradle for two—it was a large cushioned swing, with three sides. Here, on hot days, one could swing and feel the movement of air cool about one, or recline idly while attendant maids or pages plied the fan. And the ladies and gentlemen in waiting, by whom the heirs to thrones must be surrounded, were chosen by a minister with scrupulous care, for their good looks and bright spirits.

Never a tear or a groan was to come within earshot of the prince. He was not to see illness or decay in any form. And if he desired to go into the city he was to be diverted from his purpose by fresh amusements and new pleasures. Such had been the strict orders of the king.

But none can turn back the page of destiny. Little did the king dream of the truth—that all his efforts would, when the right moment came, only add strength to the determination that he dreaded. This was

not life in which his son was moving, but a play, a dream. Truth is better than any falsehood and sooner or later, the thirst for realities must awaken in the prince.

Even so it happened. One day Gautama ordered his chariot and bade the driver take him through the city that lay beyond the walls—his own city of Kapilavastu, the capital of his future kingdom. The amazed charioteer obeyed. It was not his place to refuse. Yet he dreaded the anger of the king when he should know.

They went into Kapilavastu and that day Prince Gautama saw life as it really was, for the first time. He saw the little children at play in the busy streets. In the rows of open shops, called the bazaar, the merchants sat and bargained with customers about the goods that lay before them. The embroiderer and the potter and the brass-smith sat cross-legged on their counters, hard at work, while an apprentice would pull the string that worked the bellows hidden in the mud floor,—that the fire might burn up and

heat the metal,—or turned the wheel for the potter's use. Up and down trudged the weary-looking carriers with the loads. Here and there a monk passed holding his long staff and glistening white with ashes. Ill-fed dogs snarled at one another over scraps of food, and scarcely moved even for the bullock-carts that trundled in from the country with their loads of fruit and grain and cotton.

There were very few women, and those not young, for the time was towards noon, and the morning bath was over. Yet a girl now and then passed them, perhaps, with her veil down and the great brass jar on her head, in which she was carrying water to her home.

But the streets were full of colour nevertheless, for part of the dress of men in the East is the shawl, or chudder, of brilliant hue, and woven of silk or wool, thrown across the left shoulder and brought under the right arm. Hence, in a town thoroughfare, though there is none of the musical tinkle of women's feet, there is

abundance of pale-green and rose, of purple and yellow and turquoise blue, and the passing crowds are always bright to look upon. And Gautama turned to his charioteer and said, "I see here Labour and Poverty and Hunger—yet so much Beauty and Love and Joy are mingled with them—surely in spite of them life is very sweet!"

He spoke musingly, as one in conversation with himself, and at the words, the Three Woes of Men—Weariness and Disease and Death—drew near to him. The great moment in Prince Gautama's life had come.

First came Weariness. It came as an old, old man, with bald head and toothless gums and trembling hands. There was no light in his blind and sightless eyes; there was no hearing in his ears. Weariness seemed to have made him into the grave of a man. Leaning on a crutch he held out a palsied hand for alms.

The prince leant forward and gave eagerly,—gave far more than the old man

could have dreamt of asking. He felt as if his very soul were drowning. "O Chhandaka," he cried to his charioteer, "What is it? What is it? What ails him?"

"Nay," said Chhandaka soothingly, "it is nothing. The man is merely very old." "Old!" said Gautama, thinking of his father's grey hairs, and of the venerable ministers of state, "But old people are not all like this!"

"Yes," said the charioteer, "if they are only old enough."

"My father?" said the prince, though the words nearly choked him—"My father? Yasodhara? We ourselves here?" "All men," said the charioteer solemnly, "are subject to old age, and old age, if it goes far enough, will end always thus."

Gautama was silent, overwhelmed with horror and with pity. It was only for a moment, however, and there stood beside the chariot, one whose whole skin was covered with pale pink patches, terrible to see, and the hand that he held out had lost many of

its joints. Most of us would have covered our eyes and hurried from the spot. But this was not the impulse of the prince—"*My brother!*" he said in rich tones, trembling with sympathy and reverence as he gave him a coin.

"It is a leper," said Chhandaka, as the man started in surprise at the gentleness of Gautama's voice. "It is a leper—let us drive on."

"And what is that, Chhandaka?" said Gautama.

"It is one who is overtaken by disease, Sire."

"Disease, disease, what is that?" said the prince.

"Sir, it is an ill that befalls the body, none knows how or why. It destroys comfort. It makes a man cold in the height of summer, or hot in the midst of mountain snows. One sleeps like a stone under its influence, another goes mad with excitement. In some cases the body itself drops to pieces little by little. In others it maintains its

own form, but shrinks till the bones are visible. Yet again it swells and grows hideous in its size. Such is Disease. No man knows whence it comes or whither it is driven and none of us know when it may attack ourselves."

"And this is life—that life that I thought sweet!" said Gautama. He was silent for a while. Then he looked up. "How can men get out of life?" he said. "What friend have they to release them?"

"Death," said Chhandaka. "See! there comes the bearers of the dead, carrying one to the river-side to burn."

The prince looked up, and saw four strong men bearing a low bedstead on their shoulders, and on the bed was stretched, with a white cloth over him, what looked like the form of a man. But he did not stir, under his coverlet, when a foot stumbled, and though the bearers cried, "Call on the Lord" at every step, he whom they carried made no movement of prayer.

"But indeed," the charioteer went on

earnestly, "men do not love Death. It does not seem to them a friend—rather they think it a still worse enemy than old age or disease. It takes them unawares and they hate it and try to escape it with all their might."

Then Gautama looked closer at the solemn procession, as it passed. Some inner sight seemed to be opened to him, and he saw the reason why men hated Death. It was as if a long series of pictures passed before him. He saw that the dead man yonder had died many times before and always had been born again. He saw that being dead now, he would surely come back into the world. "Of that which is born, Death is certain. Of that which is dead, Birth is certain," he said, "Lo, to the circling of life's wheel there is no beginning and no end, Chhandaka, drive home."

The charioteer turned as he was bidden, but the prince asked no more questions. He sat lost in thought. As they re-entered the palace, all that had seemed so beautiful in the past had become hateful to him—what

were grassy lawns and blossoming trees and leaping water but so many toys that kept the child from caring to know the truth? For Yasodhara and he seemed to be children dwelling with their play-things in a garden made over the mouth of a volcano that might break out and destroy them at any moment. And what they were, all other men and women also seemed as such, only others had less reason than they to enjoy the game.

His heart has become, as it were, a great throbbing ocean of compassion for mankind, and not for man only, but for all those living things in whom he saw the power to love and suffer, though they were without human speech,

"Life and Death together are an evil dream," he was saying to himself, "how are we to break it and awake?"

So the Three Woes of men stung him even as the wise men had foretold at his birth, and he could neither eat nor rest. Towards midnight, when all the household was asleep, he rose and paced about his room. He flung

open a fretted window and looked out into the night. A wind swept down upon the tops of the trees as he did so, and the earth seemed to shiver. It was really the voices of the great souls of the universe, crying "Awake! Thou that art awakened! Arise! And help the world!" And the soul of the prince heard doubtless, and understood without translating into words. Then, as he stood looking out upon the stars seeking within himself some way to break the dream of life so that a man could pass out of reach of the play of destiny—as he sought thus, he remembered suddenly the ancient wisdom of his race. "Why!" he cried, "this must be the quest that calls men to leave their homes and live in forests, covered with ashes! They must know something! That must be the way! I too will tread that road. But these never return to tell their wisdom. They keep it to themselves or share it only with the learned. I, when I know the secret, shall return and tell it to all mankind. The lowest of the low shall hear as much as the greatest.

The way of salvation shall be open to *all the world.*" With these words, he closed the casement and stole to the bedside of his sleeping wife. Gently he drew the curtains back and looked upon her face. It was then that his first struggle began. Had he any right to leave her? He might never come back. Was it not a terrible and cruel thing to make a woman a widow? His little son, too, would have to grow up without a father's care. It was all very well to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the world, but what right had one to sacrifice another?

He closed the curtains and went back to the window. Then light came. He remembered how great and noble the soul of Yasodhara had always seemed to him. And he realised that she had her share in what he was about to do. The pain of her loss would make the sacrifice half hers and the glory and the wisdom half hers too.

He hesitated no longer. Again he went to say farewell. He drew the silken curtains and looked down once more. He dared not

waken her and so he stooped, and gently kissed her foot. She moaned in her sleep and he withdrew.

Downstairs, he pushed the sleeping Chhandaka on the shoulder and bade him harness his chariot swiftly and in silence. Then they passed through the great gates stealthily and on the high road the horse broke into a quick pace, till the prince was many miles from his father's home.

As dawn broke, he stopped and dismounted. Then, one by one, he put off the robes and jewels of a prince,—sending them back by Chhandaka with loving messages as gifts to one and another—and assumed the garb of a beggar, the pink cloth and the ashes, the staff and begging bowl. Chhandaka prostrated himself before him with tears. "Tell my father I shall return," said Gautama, turning with a brief farewell, to plunge into the forest.

Chhandaka stood on the spot where he had left him long after the prince was out of sight. Then, stooping with passionate

reverence, he lifted the dust of the road where he had stood and put it on his own head, before turning the chariot homeward to take the news to the king.

For seven long years in the forest Gautama pursued his search. Then at last, meditating in the night, beneath a Bo-tree, he discovered the Great Secret and found all Knowledge. From that time other names dropped from him and he was known as the Buddha, or Blessed One.

In that moment of supreme illumination, he learnt that the thirst for life was the cause of all wretchedness. By ridding themselves of desire men could attain to freedom. And he called Freedom by the name of Nirvana, and the life of struggle for it, he called the Way of Peace.

All these happened in the forest, at the place now known as Buddha Gaya, where stands to this day an ancient temple with a great Bo-tree beside it, and to be only second in descent form the sacred tree itself. And Buddha lingered there some days to

think out many things, and then he left the forest and came to Benares, where he preached his first sermon in the Deer Park to five hundred monks. From this time, his fame went about and numbers of disciples began to join him; but by the first two merchants whom he met on their way to Kapilavastu he sent a message to Yasodhara and to his father that he was certainly coming home. Their joy was unbounded that at last they had heard from him. The old king would have liked him to make a royal entry, but when the crowds were gathered and the troops arranged about the gateway, with banners floating and horses neighing, a beggar clad from throat to foot in yellow and gathering food here and there amongst the people, happened to pass near the king's tent, and lo, it was he, his son, who had gone out in the night-time seven years ago and came back now the Buddha!

But he did not stop till he had passed within the palace and stood in his own rooms before his wife and son. Yasodhara also

wore the yellow cloth ! Ever since the morning when she wakened to learn that the prince had abandoned the world and gone to dwell in the forests, ever since that morning, she had done what she could to share his life. She had eaten only of roots and fruits. She had slept always on the floor of some roof or verandah. She had put away all ornaments and the garments of a princess.

And now she knelt reverently and kissed the hem of the left side of his garment. They said but little. He blessed her and went. And then, she seemed to waken from a dream. Hurriedly she called her boy—"Go, ask your father for your inheritance," she said.

"Mother, which is my father ?" said the boy timidly, looking at the crowd of men with shaven heads wearing the sacred colour.

But she scorned to give any description. "Your father," she said, "is the lion yonder, that passes to the gate."

And the boy went straight up to him "Father, give me my patrimony," he said.

But he asked three times, before Ananda, chief of the disciples, said, "May I give?" And Buddha said, "Give!" And the yellow cloth was thrown about the lad.

Then they turned and saw the mother behind, veiled, but evidently longing to be with her husband. And the kind-hearted Ananda said, "Master, may a woman not enter the order? May she not be one of us?"

And Buddha said, "Nay, do the Three Woes not come to women as to men? Why should their feet also not tread the Way of Peace? My Truth and my Order are for all, yet this request, Ananda, was for you to make."

Then Yasodhara also was received into the Order and went to dwell near her husband in his garden, and so her long widowhood came to an end, and her feet also were set at last upon the Way of Peace.

PRESENTED